FAITH SCIENCE AND THE FUTURE

WORLD CONFERENCE 1979

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FAITH, SCIENCE AND THE FUTURE

The World Council of Churches announces a World Conference to be held in July 1979 on faith, science, technology and the future of society.

Organized by the W.C.C.'s section on Church and Society, the Conference will relate the historic Christian struggle for social justice to the new struggle for an ecologically and technologically sustainable society.

The participants will examine

- the promise and threat of modern science and technology:
- the Christian understanding of nature, humanity and God and its consequences for our action in the struggle for a just, participatory and subtainable society;
- the ways in which science and technology are interpreted by other religions, cultures and ideologies;
- how science and technology become power and how that power is used and misused in human affairs;
- the need for and prospects of an ecologically sustainable society;
- the gap between the social and the physical sciences and its consequences;
- the differences in technological development between rich and poor countries, and how to overcome them;
- specific ethical issues facing Christians and all peoples in relation to problems like nuclear energy, biological manipulation, resource management, etc.;
- economic and political consequences of the new ecological understanding;
- the role of science and technology in helping to build a new world economic order.

Churches, Christian groups and individuals are invited to join in the study, reflection and interdisciplinary encounter which will constitute the preparation for the Conference and its follow-up. This brochure will tell you more about the plans and how to participate.

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PLAN FOR A WORLD CONFERENCE IN 1979 ON FAITH, SCIENCE AND THE FUTURE

The Contribution of Faith, Science and Technology in the Struggle for a Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society.

I. Introduction

> "The responsibility that now confronts humanity is to make a deliberate transition to a sustainable global society in which science and technology will be mobilized to meet the basic physical and spiritual needs of people, to minimize human suffering and to create an environment which can sustain a decent quality of life for all peoples. This will involve a radical transformation of civilization, new technologies, new uses for technology and new global economic and political systems... The world has reached the end of a triumphalist era in the use and development of science and technology.

This statement of the World Council of Churches' Assembly in Nairobi, December 1975, provides the starting point for a new ecumenical project of study and action on The Contribution of Faith, Science and Technology to the Struggle for a Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society.

The primary feature of this project will be a World Conference of about 400 scientists, technologists, theologians and others to be held in July 1979. The themes and problems of the Conference are however of fundamental concern to all Christians. In connection with the Conference, regional and national Councils of Churches, national churches, local congregations and individuals are invited to engage in their own programme on these issues. The study materials for this project will be made available to all interested groups and persons.

The following prospectus contains the main outlines of the plan as approved by the Central Committee of the W.C.C. in August 1977. A fuller statement of the thinking behind the project is available in the bulletin *Anticipation* no. 23, November 1976, which can be obtained from the sub-unit on Church and Society, World Council of Churches, Geneva, Switzerland.

II. Purpose and Scope of the Conference

The Conference will look for the meaning of faith in a world in which science and technology are transforming forces that both liberate and destroy persons and human values.

Science and technology are knowledge and power. They offer the promise of providing for the material needs of all people. People crave them as answers to ignorance, poverty and servitude. Yet they fear their destructive effects. (1) Science and technology are the means by which some nations and groups dominate others and achieve disproportionate wealth while others are relatively deprived. (2) Human action, aided by science and technology, threatens the earth by consuming its irreplacable resources and fouling its atmosphere and waters. (3) Industrialization produces societies in which many people feel frustrated, alienated and unable to guide their destinies or influence public policies.

The Conference will start by trying to understand the roots of these present perplexities and the necessity for changes in direction. It will move on to project a theological, ethical and practical vision of a society (1) that embodies justice for all nations and people, (2) that enables people to participate in making the decisions that affect them, and (3) that is ecologically sustainable for ourselves and our heirs. It will then look at the scientific, economic and political decisions and actions necessary for the transition. It will seek specifically to define contributions of the churches to the process and the goals.

The 1979 Conference will explore the following issues:

- The challenge of a society formed largely by science and technology to traditional theology and ethics.
- The ethical and theological basis for a view of nature, humanity and God that will be both a vision and a guide in moving towards the just, participatory and sustainable society; and the ethical and theological issues which arise in the course of scientific and technological development.
- How science and technology become power in the hands of a few and how people can participate more effectively in decisions on science and technology, such as those raised by nuclear technology.
- The meaning and consequences of the gap in technological and industrial development between rich and poor countries.
- The differing opinions about the time available before resource depletion and environmental deterioration reach the point of no return.
- How developing countries can meaningfully appropriate science and technology, particularly in relation to the need for greater self-reliance and for meeting first the needs of the poorest of the poor.
- The role of power centres, including governments and transnational corporations, in determining the direction of scientific and technological innovation, and in establishing relations of domination and dependence.
- The economic and political obstacles that must be overcome in the transition to the just, participatory and sustainable society.

– The contribution the churches can make to the immediate practical social task of using science and technology in the interest of a better society; and the equally important theological, philosophical and ethical problems they face in addressing the predicaments of our civilization and the transition to a more just, participatory and sustainable society.

(A more detailed statement of the Conference themes is given in the Annex.)

III. Size, Date, Place

It is recommended that the Conference take place about 12 days in the second half of July 1979; and that it involve about 400 participants, scientists and technologists from many different disciplines, theologians, church leaders, communicators and others.

It is expected that the Conference will be held in North America.

The staff and officers of Church and Society are authorized to select a suitable location.

IV. Participants – Quotas and Process of Selection

Composition of the Conference

The Conference participants will be subdivided as follow:

1. Participants nominated by churches according to procedure outlined below	240
2. Working Committee on Church and Society	20
3. Consultants (selected by Church and Society)	30
4. Observers (fraternal ecumenical bodies, U.N. agencies, world scientific organizations, etc.)	20
5. W.C.C. Programme Staff	10
Total	320

There would be in addition:

Conference for Science Students (see item V below)	75-80
Conference administrative staff (secretaries, translators, and interpreters, etc., largely coopted from the host country)	50
Total	125-130

Regional Quotas

The following regional quotas are suggested for the 240 Church-nominated participants:

Africa	30
Asia	40
Middle East	5
Australasia	7
Pacific	3
North America	50
Latin America	30
Caribbean	5
Eastern Europe	35
Western Europe	35
Total	240

In both the main Conference and the Science Students Conference the participation of other faiths and ideologies will be ensured although these are to be Christian and not inter-religious conferences. To this end 15 persons representing other faiths and ideologies will be invited to the main Conference and 10 to the Science Students Conference.

Process for Selection of Participants

The W.C.C. is very eager to ensure that all interested member churches have an opportunity to send representatives. It is also seeking to ensure that a proper balance is maintained between regions and sexes; between persons of various scientific and technological backgrounds; and between theologians, philosophers of science and others concerned with the impact of science and technology on modern society. To assure the best possible balance the following selection procedure is proposed:

1. All W.C.C. member churches will be invited to nominate as prospective participants a list of 4 or 5 persons including scientists, technologists, theologians, pastors, and others, from among whom the participants will be selected.
2. The Working Committee on Church and Society or, on its authority, its officers will be responsible for the selection of participants in accordance with the need for a balanced and fair distribution according to the variety of competence needed at the Conference.
3. The Executive Committee (or officers) of the W.C.C. will review the final list of selected participants to insure that a geographical, ecclesiastical, interdisciplinary, age and sex balance is obtained.
4. The General Secretary of the W.C.C. and the Working Committee on Church and Society will issue invitations in the name of the World Council of Churches and will inform the churches about the final selection.

V. Science Students Conference

In connection with the main Conference the W.C.C. plans to hold a conference of 75-80 senior natural and social science students. This student conference will secure sufficient participation of youth in the large Conference. It is important also since they have a specific role in the shaping of science and technology for the future. The plan will provide for some shared sessions and some separate sessions. The intention is to invite primarily science students (generally defined) including some theological students. These will be selected in consultation with churches, university and college chaplains, leaders of student Christian movements, and other student leaders, as well as professors and teachers active in the work of Church and Society. A senior or graduate student will be seconded to the staff of Church and Society for one year to help prepare and organize the meeting. Five or six science students will be invited to attend the meeting of the Church and Society Working Committee in 1978 to plan the programme of the Student Conference.

VI. Preparatory Publications, Studies and Meetings

The 1979 Conference is able to build on the ecumenical study programme which began in 1970. This has provided a valuable body of experience and material especially in relation to ethical problems in genetics (Zürich 1973), nuclear power (Sigtuna 1975 and follow-up), ecology (Nemi 1971 and Cardiff 1972), and issues of science and faith (Mexico City 1975). The Conference on Science and Technology for Human Development (Bucharest 1974) provides the basis for our further thinking on the just distribution of the benefits and power which science and technology make possible.

Publications

The Working Committee plans to publish a popular study book on the issues and themes of the Conference for use by local churches and by groups and individuals, interested in sharing in the Conference preparation. A book of 140 to 150 pages is envisaged, to be available in early 1978.

Other publications envisaged are: several preparatory study books and special numbers of *Anticipation* on the themes of the Conference.

Preparatory Consultations and Meetings

Consultations held in 1977

- On the Ideological and Theological Debate about Science, Cambridge, U.K., June 20-26, 1977.
- On Nature, Humanity and God, Zürich, July 11-16, 1977.
  (Reports of these consulations will soon be available.)

Consultations Projected for 1977-1978

1. A meeting of no more than 10–15 economists and ecologically concerned scientists and one or two theologians, who have a favourable view of the overall goal of the just and sustainable society to generate new ideas and bring together existing ideas concerning economic policies for achieving a just and sustainable society. This conference is being planned in cooperation with the CCPD.

2. Consultation on "Decision-Making in Scientific Research and Technological Innovation". There is an acknowledged state of tension between scientific values and value judgements in technological innovations. The consultation would need to investigate risk assessment; whether scientific endeavours in certain areas should be restrained; who should make decisions (technological élites, governments or the public); how people can be adequately informed on technical issues and effectively participate in decision-making.
3. Consultation of church leaders and scientists on "Ecumenical Concerns in Relation to Nuclear Energy".
4. Consultation on "The Ethics of Ecological Sustainability and Social Justice". A meeting of theologians, biblical scholars and scientists to examine some of the ethical dilemmas related to the conflicts between the instrumental and intrinsic value of nature and creativity; the evaluation of modern technology in relation to ecological hazards.
5. Consultation on the Approach to Science in Socialist Countries.

Under Consideration:

Exploratory meetings or studies are being considered on:

- Genetic Engineering
- Sociobiology and Behaviour Control
- Food and Agricultural Technology
- New Life Styles
- Population Policy in a Sustainable Society
- New Sources of Energy
- Insights available from Traditional Cultures in Africa and Asia.

1978 Meeting of the Working Committee on Church and Society

The 1978 meeting of the Working Committee will make the final preparations for the 1979 Conference, including programme, speakers, structure of the Conference, list of participants, etc. It is planned to hold this meeting in August 1978, in the German Democratic Republic.

Regional Meetings

The number of these will be determined in light of the themes and preparatory programme of the Conference. About 8 or 9 are envisaged. The W.C.C seeks to hold such regional meetings in Africa, Asia and Latin America to encourage contributions and participation from these areas.

Asia: Japan, India and Indonesia; East and West Africa; Latin America: Argentina and the Caribbean (possibly also Brazil); Eastern Europe: Regional Conference on the Contribution of the Churches in Socialist Countries to the 1979 Conference, G.D.R., August 1978; Western Europe: to be planned; North America: to be planned; Middle East: to be planned.

VII. Time Schedule: 1977-1981, including the Preparation and the Follow-up of the Conference

The following stages are envisaged:

- *July 1977.* Discussion by the Central Committee of a detailed plan for the Conference with recommendations.
- *January 1978.* Publication of a "popular" booklet on the Conference theme for discussion in the churches.
- *October 1977 – May 1979.* Preparatory international consultations and regional meetings in Africa, Asia and Latin America, Eastern and Western Europe, and North America.
- *August 1978.* Meeting of the Working Committee to prepare the final programme of the Conference.
- *July 1979.* International Conference meets.
- *September – December 1979.* Publication of reports and papers of the Conference.
- *January 1980 – July 1981.* Discussion and evaluation by the churches of the Conference findings. (July 1980 – Report on Conference findings to the Central Committee.) Preparation of recommendations for 1983 W.C.C. Assembly.

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ANNEX I

Themes for the 1979 Conference on the Contribution of Faith, Science and Technology in the Struggle for a Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society.

A. Science and Technology as Promise and Threat

1. The *promise* of science and technology is so impressive, that most people and societies have welcomed it and still put great hopes in the acquisition of new science and technologies. Science through its contribution to understanding liberates people from ignorance and superstition. Technology promises to relieve poverty and provide all people with their basic needs. It has brought liberation from many forms of insecurity and drudgery.

2. The *threat* of science and technology comes in part from deliberate human uses, in part from unexpected consequences of uses. The few (groups, classes, nations) who can afford big science and elaborate technology gain great power over those who cannot. Environmental deterioration, long a problem, has recently become a massive threat to the globe. The depletion of non-renewable resources imposes major threats on humanity in the near and long-term future. The organization of society around big-scale technologies leads to frustration of persons caught up in systems they feel powerless to influence. Mass production institutes some of the drudgery that technology promised to eliminate. People complain of the dehumanizing of work and social relations, of the alienation of persons from other persons and groups, from society, from nature, from themselves.

3. The promise and threats already evident are signals that can alert people to the promises and threats of newer and anticipated technologies; e.g. automation, genetic engineering, laser technology, satellite monitoring, new energy technologies, behaviour control, communications technologies (including data banks), and new agricultural technologies.

B. Science in Relation to Humanity, Nature and God

1. Science and faith both contribute to human understanding, although not in identical ways. There is need for active interaction between the two, both to enhance understanding and to pursue human purposes. As science has modified religious beliefs and practices, faith can and should contribute to a theological critique of prevalent scientific and technological world-views. Because of a history, sometimes of hostility and sometimes of isolation between science and faith, creative interaction is both urgent and difficult.

2. The contemporary historical situation gives the church an obligation to recover and reconceptualize a theological and biblical vision of the relation between God, humanity and nature. There is need for fresh attention to the doctrines of creation, of dominion and stewardship, of the Kingdom of God. There is a special need to show what these beliefs mean for the concrete dilemnas and decisions the world faces. There are opportunities for theological evaluation of insights from other religions, including those of traditional cultures in Africa and Asia.

3. The church – by exploring the biblical and theological bases for the concepts of sustainability, participation and justice – can rediscover parts of its own heritage and contribute to contemporary human sensitivity.

4. Theological inquiry can contribute to resolving some ethical issues related to modern science and technology. Some particularly important issues arise in: genetic engineering, nuclear energy, the green revolution.

C. The Meaning of the Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society

1. This concept, the biblical roots of which are considered in theme B.2 needs definition in relation to the concrete institutions of the contemporary world. One basis of the definition will be a consideration of quality of life, as a concept to be compared with the quantitative indicators so often used to measure economic and social success.

2. *Technology and justice.* One major obstacle to justice is the sheer disproportion of power – military, political and economic – that goes with the technological inequalities in our world. This leads to questions about technology as an "intellectual possession" and about the transfer and sharing of technology.

3. *Technology and participation.* How can the public become responsible participants in decisions on technical issues? E.g., in cases of dangerous (or allegedly dangerous) technologies – e.g., nuclear power and DNA transfer – how can the public get accurate information for risk assessment and decisions?

4. *Technology and sustainability.* What forms of conservation, recycling and moderate use of renewable resources can contribute to sustainability? What help is there in "appropriate" technology? Is alienation in troubled urban and industrial centres a threat to social sustainability? How can justice contribute to sustainability?

D. The Immediate Obstacles to Responsible Economic and Political Decisions about Science and Technology

1. *Political and economic.* National governments tend to focus on short term, not long term benefits. National governments are reluctant to give up any of the powers science and technology bestow. Yet individual nations must begin the transition because the world lacks the institutions to decide. Powerful economic groups, founded on fortuitous ownership, likewise focus on short term benefits and resist reallocation of power. In some cases conflicts between justice and

sustainability make transition difficult; e.g., conservation may appear to workers as a threat to employment.

2. *Technological.* Technological optimists claim that problems will be solved by more (of the same) technology. Technological pessimists evoke public hysteria or fatalism. "Super star" (highly complex and elaborate) technology (e.g., nuclear breeder reactors, supersonic aircraft) may develop a momentum that is hard to control.

E. Strategies for Transition

1. The situation calls for a search for strategies of change. Such strategies can be directed at several issues, including the following possibilities: redistribution of wealth and power, with special attention to the poorest of the poor; cartels to equalize bargaining power of weak nations in relation to strong nations; making the sustainable society less threatening and more attractive; new social criteria for investment; ways of making national and international decisions on super star technologies for the future; world income tax; resource banks for food and other resources; means for immediate transfer of technologies.

2. Special emphasis should go to strategies for:

- Reduced consumption and production in the rich world, and concomitant increase in the poor world;
- the relation between self-reliance and interdependence as economic models for nations or regions;
- the meaningful appropriation of science and technology in developing countries (i.e., appropriate social and technical systems);
- needed structural changes – economic, political, technological – for the redistribution of resources and technological capability.

3. Attention to these strategies will lead to the question: is it possible to handle these problems of transition within existing political ideologies and systems, or does the situation call for something new?

F. The Churches: Programme of Action for the Transition to a JPSS

Programmatic possibilities open to the churches:

- Education and interpretation for church members and the public.
- Advocacy of social change, including public influence.
- Overcoming division within the churches through ecumenical activity.
- Commitment of time and resources to programmes of action.
- Development of imaginative projects.

ANNEX II

Participants – Meeting of the Working Group on Church and Society, Morschach, Switzerland, July 1977, which prepared this Prospectus

1. Members of the Working Group

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W.C.C. Literature on the Contribution of Faith, Science and Technology in the Struggle for the Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society

A. BOOKS

Facing up to Nuclear Power,
edited by John Francis and Paul Abrecht, 1976. The St. Andrew Press, Edinburgh, and The Westminster Press, Philadelphia.

Genetics and the Quality of Life,
edited by Charles Birch and Paul Abrecht, 1975. Pergamon Press.

Ecology and Human Liberation,
Thomas S. Derr, 1975. The Westminster Press, Philadelphia.

The Human Presence,
Metropolitan Paulos Gregorios (to be published January 1978).

Humanity, Nature and God,
Papers and Report of an Ecumenical Enquiry, July 1977, on the theological critique of our ecologocal situation (to be published in 1978).

Faith, Science and Society,
Preparatory Study Book for the 1979 Conference (to be published about March 1978).

B. ANTICIPATION – the Church and Society Bulletin:

No. 19 (November 1974)
Science and Technology for Human Development
Report of the 1974 W.C.C. Conference (Bucharest)

No. 22 (May 1976)
Science and Faith

No. 23 (November 1976)
Energy for a Just and Sustainable Society

No. 24 (November 1977)
The Churches and the Nuclear Debate

No. 25 (January 1978)
The Ideological and Theological Debate about Science.

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